

AUTONOMOUS RESISTANCE TO SLAVERY AND COLONIZATION;

TWO ESSAYS BY RUSSELL MAROON SHOATZ

“These early Maroons were able to overcome language barriers, mistrust, and the growing influence of racial doctrines that eventually evolved into the white supremacist cultural construct outside of the swamp. That is not to say that they didn’t have any racial or ethnic prejudices. It’s absolutely clear, however, that they overcame them enough to be able to live, support, protect, fight and die for each other for well over 100 years.”

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Introduction

Many insurrectionary anarchists rarely engage with the legacy of the Black Liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Too often dismissed as Maoist, identitarian, or authoritarian in their content, many veterans of these struggles have analyzed the successes and limits of these movements, and have much to teach the contemporary insurrectionary anarchist in terms of what an insurrectionary project that attacks the racial order might look like. Russell “Maroon” Shoats is one of these veterans: a combatant in the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, now serving sentences for an attack on a police station in Philadelphia in 1970. Shoats has since written a number of essays that analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies of the Black Liberation efforts he was a part of, as well as documenting instances of autonomous anti-colonial revolt that are overlooked in most analyses from both white anarchist and black leftist histories.

The two pieces in this pamphlet, “The Real Resistance to Slavery in North America” and “The Dragon and the Hydra: A Historical Study of Organizational Methods” are valuable for our endeavors because they break out of the white workerist histories to which anarchy is too often confined and tell the stories of the multiracial Maroon communes of the American swamps and other territories in the colonized world, which autonomously organized themselves for self-preservation and for attack against the white supremacist violence of slavery and colonization. In the second essay of this anthology, Shoats states, “First off, let me state that I’m not an anarchist. Yet, a lot of what you’ll read here is gonna look a whole lot like anarchism!...to the anarchist reader, what follows cannot properly be termed anarchism, simply because the practitioners themselves never knew that word, nor were they in contact with people of that view, as anarchism is a European ideology and these parties – for the most part – were Africans and Amerindians with very limited input by a small number of outcast Europeans.” In some of Shoats’ writing, his reference points within the Marxist-Leninist ideologies of the past can seem heretical to anti-authoritarian readers, yet if one takes his writing as a whole they can see that this investigation into history is one that ultimately indicts Leninism for its strategic uselessness and offers instead a proposal for decentralized, autonomous attack.

- pro full human rights for everyone
- anti-capitalism
- pro-sustainable economics
- anti-entropic environmental, species, and technological practices
- pro-species and environmental projections

The “mosaic” will be built on the principles of seeking to recruit both from amongst the most oppressed segments, and from amongst the most selfless. The former found primarily within the ranks of the lower class, women, people and color, and GLBTQ peoples, while the selfless are found, to a lesser degree, amongst all segments.

The “mosaic” must immediately begin to spread its messages by recruiting people who are willing to help by producing publications of all sorts, as well as utilizing any and all other means that do not transgress its principles, to aggressively push its messages. All mosaic people can contribute to this effort autonomously, while always keeping in mind our collective stance, as well as the sensibilities of other mosaic and oppressed peoples.

Finally, the mosaic must immediately begin a dialogue toward building a consensus—as near as possible—about how to best further coordinate our collective efforts.

The “mosaic”—an ideological jumping off point that will serve all of our separate and collective interests; it can also be termed Inter-Communal Self- Determination :

Inter : existing between Communal : 1. Of or relating to a community. 2.Characterized by collective ownership and use of property. 3. Participation in, shared, or used in common by members of a group or community.

Self-Determination : 1. Free choice of one’s acts without external compulsion. 2.Determination by the people of a territorial unit of their own future political status.

Our “mosaic” would consist of elements from amongst individuals, groups and communities---some of whom are already benefiting from interacting and working together—with room for expansion. They include, but are not limited to:

- Women (individuals and groups)
- New Afrikan and Pan Afrikan peoples
 - Puerto Ricans
- Anarchists and Anti-authoritarians
 - Asians
- Chicano and Mexican peoples
 - Native Americans
- Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Bisexual, Genderqueer and Transgender peoples
 - Euro-Americans
 - Ecological Activists
 - Animal Rights Activists
 - Working Class peoples
 - People with dis/abilities
- People who are/have been incarcerated

Our political posture would include—but not be limited by the following:

- pro-self determination for everyone
- anti-economic, political, and cultural domination
- pro-gender and sexual choice, freedom, and inclusivity
- anti-racism, gender, caste, and class oppression

For insurrectionary anarchists, the ideological framework of these revolts or the people who participated in them should be of no concern because we can recognize that the efforts that Shoats documents were insurrectionary in practice: the chaotic beauty of autonomous territories for survival and attack against the social order. We hope reading these tales and engaging with Shoats’ writing will encourage white anarchists to more thoroughly investigate the historical sagas of autonomous, decentralized revolts of those who are too often left out of our understandings of the past, as well as questioning ways that we can attack the racial order that still holds so many in chains.

valerie queen, *nycp*

The Real Resistance to Slavery in North America

Long before the founding of the country, Africans were transported to what later became known as the United States of America. Some came as free individuals and companions of the Europeans from Spain and elsewhere. They were ship guides, sailors, soldiers, explorers, and adventurers. Others, however, were “enslaved” workers.

The earliest known enslaved Africans were brought by the Spanish to serve in a colony that was set up in what is today the Carolinas. There, within a couple of years (around 1528) the survivors are reported to have “rebelled and escaped to dwell amongst the Indians.” In the mid 1500s, an even less-known but larger group came as “free colonizers” from South America. They numbered at least 300 and had been formerly enslaved, but were part of a successful rebellion and takeover by enslaved Africans and English and “mixed-race” privateers, or pirates.

They, along with a larger group of *indigenous South Americans, were recruited by England to help shore up the failing English colony at Roanoke, Virginia / North Carolina. They eventually abandoned Roanoke and melted into the countryside— never to be heard from again.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Spanish, English, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Danish vied to control North, Central, and South America as well as the Caribbean islands. At that time, however, the Amerindians-- contrary to popular myth-- were still the strongest military power in all of those areas, not discounting the breakup and conquest of the large Aztec and Inca empires. Thus, Europeans were forced to use a strategy of “divide and conquer,” forming alliances of convenience with and using the various Amerindian ethnic groups and confederations to fight each other, primarily to enslave the defeated and sell them to the Europeans, keep all of them off balance while the European colonies were weak and, finally, to police the enslaved Africans and “indentured” whites.

Outside of a small number of coastal enclaves where the Europeans could concentrate their power with the aid of ships and cannons, the only leverage they had over the militarily strong Amerindians was the use of their “trade goods.” Many Amerindians deeply

tudes to use any and all means to bring about the needed changes –or perish. And modern means of communications will provide them with the means to both update and imitate the earlier hydra’s strengths, avoid its weaknesses –while guarding against the tendency of the dragons to concentrate oppressive power in its hands.

Thus, since both the shared needs and necessity for change is already present, along with the tools to communicate, then our final consideration is whether or not these masses must centralize their organizing (not to be confused with the obvious need to coordinate their efforts!). To that I answer with an emphatic, ‘no!’ and further, I contend that such centralization will only make it easier for our oppressors to identify and level repression upon us –prolonging the crisis our generation must deal with.

The historical records of our dragon and hydra are clear. The choice is yours as to which you will choose. As a step connected to my thesis, I put forth the following organizational format:

The Mosaic

Mosaic: a surface decoration made by inlaying small pieces of variously colored material to form pictures or patterns.

At present, there are sectarian divisions due to racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, cultural, and geographic differences that hinder individuals, organizations, and entire communities who already interact, cooperate to various degrees, share many of the same concerns, and are faced with similar obstacles to their well-being. But we can all come together like a “mosaic” and more toward creating positive changes in our collective well-being.

The “mosaic” will not be an effort directed toward imposing any type of multi-racial, multi-ethnic, gender neutral or conformist utopian universalism. No! The mosaic will allow individuals, organizations, and entire communities to exercise self-determination in deciding what types of social orders they choose to struggle to bring into being, while at the same time learning how to better come together with others to form societies that will be superior to the ones in which we now live.

Thus, the word “mosaic” fits us in many ways. We will add to the dictionary definition by defining ourselves as “the mosaic: the movement of oppressed sectors acting in concert.”

gary in forty-eight hours took over all of the means of production in that society, created a form of dual power, forced the Community Party to re-organize under another name, and was crushed by nothing in Hungarian society but by an invasion of Soviet tanks.”

James wrote:

“Now if the party is the knowing of the proletariat, then the coming of age of the proletariat cans the abolition of the party. That is our universal, stated in its boldest and most abstract form...The party as we know it must disappear. It is disappearing. It will disappear as the state will disappear. The whole laboring population becomes the state. That is the disappearance of the state. It can have no other meaning. It withers away by expanding to such a degree that it is transformed into its opposite. And the party does the same... for if the party does not wither away, the state never will” (C.L.R. James, Notes on Dialectics, London: Allison and Busby, 1980 175-76).

“On the other hand, even after the fact, the left could not deal with events that demolished their theories of the necessity of a vanguard party, and proceeded to ignore the movements in Hungary, in France and in Poland – movements which Marx or Lenin would have pounced on to study and to hone and bring up to date their revolutionary theories” (Glberman’s Introduction to Marxism for Our Times).

Conclusion

It’s clear that today’s center of gravity, the aspects on which all else is dependent and rests is the shared (global) consciousness of the multitudes of the earth’s workers and oppressed peoples, that their lives are daily becoming more and more intolerable, hence, solidifying them ideologically around the necessity for revolutionary change (like our earlier Maroons were solidified around the need to escape enslavement), and the ability of these multitudes to communicate with each other and share ideas and methods about the best ways to proceed towards that goal.

Therefore, the global hardships brought about by today’s imperialists and their voracious accumulation of wealth, and their destruction of the environment and cultures will propel the multi-

desired these goods and eventually allowed themselves to become “enslavers” – on a massive scale – in order to acquire the metal utensils, tools, jewelry, cloth, blankets, mirrors, guns and gunpowder, alcoholic spirits, knick knacks and other goods; either for use, status or in the case of the guns, powder, hatchets and knives – for sheer survival!

It is true that the Amerindians practiced a form of enslavement prior to any contact with Europeans, however slavery’s overall effect on their societies was relatively mild, mainly because although the Amerindians practiced farming on a broad scale, the plantation farming introduced by the Europeans, which demanded huge numbers of tightly disciplined and overworked enslaved people, was unheard of... and undesired.

Ironically, the Amerindians were successfully manipulated to become deeply involved in conflicts with neighboring groups, the same way that on the continent of Africa vast numbers of people and wide expanses of land were simultaneously falling victim to an equally disastrous cycle of wars to enslave people for trade goods and weapons to defend themselves against enslavement.

During this early period, race, as it’s viewed today, made little difference. After all, one could find Africans, Amerindians and whites all equally enslaved on the same plantations, in the towns and on ships. History shows clearly that all three cooperated with each other in rebellions, escapes and other enterprises. Indeed, such cooperation was always dreaded by the slave masters and was one of the primary reasons that the enslavement of whites and Amerindians was eventually phased out all over the western hemisphere.

Amerindians and whites found it easier to escape enslavement. The Amerindians knew the land and also had kinfolk to help or seek out. The whites could better blend in with free people, or join others moving to colonize other parts of the land. The Africans, on the other hand, had no such advantage. They either found sympathetic Amerindians to help them, or had to try to find and join with other runaways, called “Maroons,” fugitive enslaved people of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean islands who had set up their own communities.

Africans continually escaped enslavement, from as far back as 1502 when they were first brought to this hemisphere, and thus, Maroons were always active to a greater or lesser degree. The early Maroons were Africans, whites and Amerindians, and were viewed as a major threat to the entire institution of plantation slavery. In

certain areas they threatened the elite colonizers domination and control of their colonies. In the elites' calculation, any large Maroon community stood a good chance of uniting the Amerindians not addicted to their trade goods, with both the indentured and "poor whites," and also the enslaved Africans – all of whom heavily outnumbered the landowning and other upper class whites.

This writer, contrary to popular practice, will not dwell on or attempt to outline the innumerable ways individuals resisted slavery, or detail the names of the multitude of known actors – except for a few that cannot go unmentioned. No doubt, one surefire way of mis-educating people of all races about the real resistance to slavery has been, and continues to be, the highlighting of the most spectacular instances of resistance, and afterwards burying the oppressed in the depressing day to day inhumanity of the slave system... a method that cannot help but sour most people's desire to learn more about the overall subject.

Instead, I will help you see the more or less "hidden" resistance to slavery in North America by outlining three major, long running, and ultimately successful efforts to resist and overcome that system. Then, once you see how much crucial historical data has been kept under wraps, I'm confident that you will be stimulated to go beyond what is being taught in search of further knowledge on the subject, as well as deciding what lessons that knowledge holds for us today.

The successful 150-plus years of Maroon resistance centered on the Dismal Swamp of Virginia and North Carolina; The equally successful 150-plus year struggle of the Black Seminole Maroons and their Amerindian allies in Florida and throughout all of the areas they were forced to travel, and, The Underground Railroad of the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The Dismal Swamp

The awesome, defiant and legendary Dismal Swamp straddles the eastern sections of southern Virginia and northern North Carolina. Even today it contains vast expanses of extremely harsh and dangerous wilderness areas, although much of the original swamp has been drained.

In the 15th – 19th centuries, however, it stretched at least one hundred miles one way, and sixty miles the other; which means it was almost as large as the state of Delaware. It was recorded to

underground only to surface as today's Bizango, Zobop, Bossu, Macandal, Voltigeurs and other semi-secret Vodun societies, thereby constituting a major segment of Haitian society that no domestic or foreign oppressors have ever been able to eradicate; although the dictator "Papa Doc" Duvalier was able to manipulate some of them by integrating them into dreaded "ton ton macoute" secret police.

And in another Stan Goff book, *Sex and War*, he tells us, "there are Maroons in Haiti again, with the wave of repression sweeping the country in the wake of the last U.S.-crafted coup d'etat (February 29, 2004)... twice in 2004 I visited one of these Maroon communities in the Central Plateau" (8).

And it's hardly the case that we must restrict our study of the strengths and weaknesses of centralized and decentralized groups as I have. What about the history of how decentralized forces defeated Napoleon's army in pain; how decentralized forces have defeated every known invader in the border regions of what is today Afghanistan and Pakistan, and how decentralized insurgents are today defeating the U.S. and her allies in Iraq?

Some Parting Words from a Farsighted Marxist

C.L.R. James penned *The Black Jacobins* many years before he would later crystallize his theories about the ideas here. Yet on this in the *Introduction to Marxism for Our Times: C.L.R. James on Revolutionary Organization*, edited by Martin Glaberman (1999, University Press of Mississippi) we learn, "in 1948 James wrote what was eventually published as "Notes on Dialectics." This was a study of working class organization in light of dialectics and marked the ultimate break with Trotskyism, the rejection of the vanguard party. The importance of this break and the theoretical validation of the James viewpoint was demonstrated eight years later in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and later the French revolt of 1968, the Czech spring of 1968, and the solidarity movement in Poland in 1980... On the one hand, no group of the left or of the right was in any way prepared to accept the possibility of proletarian revolution in totalitarian dictatorships of Eastern Europe or in a democratic country such as France. All of their assumptions proved false: that the working class needed a party to lead it in revolution; that the working class needed a press and a network of communication; that what was needed was some crisis in the society such as a depression or a war. With none of these factors in place, the workers of Hun-

Thus, we can clearly see how Haiti's dragon forces played a very ambivalent role in the rebel fight for independence: They started out as tenacious and brilliant fighters against all of the European imperial and colonial elements, and the traitors amongst the Mulatto's, who were all but bent on keeping the enslaved Africans underfoot. During the course of the revolutionary struggle, they all opportunistically switched to the French imperialist's side, and went on to attempt to drown the still revolutionary masses and their decentralized group in blood; hoping that way the French would allow them to serve as a new elite class of African policemen against a re-enslaved African worker's class.

Failing to suppress the rebels, the dragon forces rejoined the hydra elements and lent their weight to totally defeating the French, only to once again turn against the revolutionary masses by establishing themselves as a dictatorial and exploitative African elite.

For its part, the decentralized hydra forces never veered from their objectives of winning as much freedom from servitude and oppression as possible.

From the pre-revolutionary times of Mackandal, up through the 1791-1804 Haitian revolutionary war, and even down to our time, they've continued to struggle towards those ends. And it's highly instructive to know that in addition to fighting the French during their revolution, they were also under attack by Toussaint's dragon forces, who displayed hatred and fear of everything from their refusal to relinquish their maroon/decentralized organizational formations, to their practice of their traditional Vodun (Voodoo) spiritual systems, the latter which did a great deal to inspire their soldiers to martyr themselves for the cause of freedom. And the treacherous attacks carried out on them by Christophe and Desalines – even while both sides were allied against the imperialists – were early signs that the dragon forces were ultimately concerned with power for its own sake.

Then, after being pushed to the side after the French were driven out, the decentralized hydra elements were forced to – again – go underground and eventually morph into semi-secret Vodun societies that until today remain a little recognized or understood autonomous element amongst the oppressed Haitians. Wade Davis' classic *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, as well as *Voodoo in Haiti*, by Alfred Metraux (1972, Shocken Books), paints a fascinating picture of how these decentralized elements went from centuries of being Maroon guerrillas, to revolutionary fighters, later to be forced

contain everything within it: from poisonous snakes and other reptiles, to alligators, bears, big cats and insects unknown to the early colonists. It's swampy marshes and bogs were so treacherous until only the most daring and knowledgeable – or foolhardy – Europeans would venture far into them.

From all accounts, the first known Maroons to occupy and use this swamp as a place of concealment, a natural fortress, a liberated territory and a home were Amerindians. They were, sadly, escaping from the enslavement that had all but engulfed the eastern and southern sections of the continent. They were joined there by kinfolk and other Amerindians who had suffered defeats in wars with rival groups acting in league with European colonists.

It's unclear whether the Amerindians were first joined by runaway Africans or whites. One would assume that white runaways would seek out more hospitable surroundings, but below I'll lay out a much misunderstood social phenomenon that will help explain such an oversight. It hardly matters though, as historical record reflects repeated examples of Amerindians, Africans and whites all using the swamp as a refuge from as far back as the early 1700s.

These early Maroons were able to overcome language barriers, mistrust, and the growing influence of racial doctrines that eventually evolved into the white supremacist cultural construct outside of the swamp. That is not to say that they didn't have any racial or ethnic prejudices. It's absolutely clear, however, that they overcame them enough to be able to live, support, protect, fight and die for each other for well over 100 years.

Obviously, there was also intermixing. Between the Amerindians and Africans it proceeded to the point where it became virtually impossible to know any difference between them. The whites on the other hand, though also mixing with the Africans and Amerindians, still by and large remained phenotypically Caucasoid. That, however, worked to everyone's advantage because the white Maroons and their descendants could still interact with the surrounding white society.

Indeed, white Maroons largely came to occupy areas of the swamp that bordered on the surrounding white-dominated society, while the other Maroons stayed in the interior. Such an arrangement helped to establish and sustain lively trade that was carried on by those in the interior, who would hunt, fish and trap wild game for sale through their white Maroon allies. Also, wood products were

produced in abundance in the interior. So much so, until it began to effect the local economy, which caused George Washington – who would later become President – to find himself in hot water after being accused of using Dismal Swamp Maroons to provide his private company with wooden house shingles.

Interestingly, the white Maroons were probably the first to be labeled with the “poor white trash” derogatory epithet. When reflecting on the social evolution of things, consider the following--after escaping indentured servitude, one had to remain ever wary of being found out and returned. Over time, therefore, those who did not melt into the broader white society took on a self-protective, insular, standoffish, hostile to strangers, semi-outlaw mentality. Assuredly, they would trade with the broader white society, but they occupied (if they could be said to be “occupiers” of any permanent places at all) their own hardscrabble areas – places so inhospitable that they attracted only scorn. Generally, they wouldn’t dedicate themselves to being reliable employees of any land owner, mill owner, ship captain or even slave catcher! Plus, they were known by all as being under none of white society’s other social restraints...so the elites labeled them not “poor whites,” but since they were seen as unable to be restrained, unreliable and useless = trash! It is only much later that the epithet would be used to shame and discipline poor whites in general. In fact this same phenomenon came to play itself out a little differently further west in the Appalachian mountains and foothills, except there the many descendants of runaway indentured whites came to be called “hillbillies.” Unquestionably, the latter’s legendary clannishness, hostility to all outsiders, secretiveness and fierce protectiveness of their kin and tiny communities, as well as the disdain and economic isolation and poverty that has systematically been imposed on them, leaves very little doubt as to their history!

Although they are generally viewed as being ultra-racists, placing their racism in the context of their hostility to and vision of outsiders as enemies...puts their “racism” in a different category all together. Furthermore, real hillbilly culture does not see itself as being in league with the dominant culture or system. Their loyalty is ultimately to their own small clans and communities. And all law enforcement authorities know it!

In addition, its such elements that bring a historically ultra-militant and violent posture to labor disputes between coalminers and mine owners, police and National Guards in Appalachia, and

ralled, hand-cuffed and chained, and they subsequently then set out to use the ‘revolutionary army’ to deliver the masses back into slavery! Simply because Napoleon feared them, his secret plan was to place all of Haiti’s Africans into chattel slavery, and he sent his brother in law and (eventually) sixty thousand more French troops to accomplish his aims.

Recognizing the weaknesses of the dragon forces, and the true intentions of the French “[Lamour] Derance and the petty chieftains, North, South and West, each in his own district summoned Blacks to revolt” (James, 327). So, here we see the hydra doing battle with the (now) traitorous dragon and the French imperialists.

“It is a recurrent tale this (Dessalines and his generals hunt down these ‘Brigands’). Once more, the masses had shown greater political understanding than their leaders” (James 338-339 and footnote 39). Our formerly heroic revolutionary army had been reduced to suppressing the revolutionary masses and forcing the latter into, “...fighting Black generals [who were] trying to crush the ‘Brigands’ for the French,” [propelling our hydra back to center stage]. “The little local leaders... beat off [their and the French] attacks...causing the French to be more open to yellow fever” (James, 346-347).

Consequently, we witness the decentralized hydra elements launching the revolution, being displaced by Toussaint’s army – the dragon – only to resume their leadership roles during a crisis that saw the dragon capitulate to the French, thus showing itself as the most indispensable weapon the revolutionaries developed.

Later, as is well-known, Toussaint was kidnapped and taken to France where he later died in prison, opening the way for his chief lieutenant Jean Jacques Dessalines to (again) switch back to the rebels’ side, rally the revolutionary army to also switch back to the masses’ side, and along with the hydra forces go on to totally annihilate the remaining French forces on the island and declare independence and appoint himself the new country’s emperor.

An excellent soldier, Dessalines showed himself to be a cruel tyrant over the Haitian people. Thus, he was assassinated by them within a few years of assuming power.

He was replaced by another general from the dragon forces: Henry Christophe, who was appointed president in 1807, but by 1811 had declared himself king. He too would be killed by his own people in 1829.

Within two years of the beginning of the French revolution, and continuing for twelve harrowing years, the Haitian revolutionaries would go on to militarily engage and defeat first their colonial enslavers, and afterwards a succession of armies fielded by Spain and England, as well as a traitorous Mulatto army, and finally tens of thousands of Napoleon Bonaparte's veteran French 'revolutionary' troops. The victorious Africans would go on to found the country of Haiti in 1803/1804; the only country in world history established by formerly enslaved workers.

What better example could we use to weigh Marx's words about the "workers" engaging in, "fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and peoples struggles... in order to change yourself and make yourself fit for political rule?" C.L.R. James, who penned the classic *Black Jacobins* (1963, Random House) dissects that struggle. In it, James compares the Haitian revolutionary army led by Toussaint and later Jean Jacques Dessalines and Henry Christophe with the later Russian Bolshevik party: "[Toussaint and]...his Black army generals filling the political role of the Bolshevik party" (James, 283). This brilliantly led, tightly organized and courageous army represents my dragon here. And James' book does much to rescue them from the shadows of history from our study. They are the ones who would surface as the most notable elements, while scores of the decentralized receded to the background.

So on first reading about them, you would think that this centralized dragon was the revolutionaries' best weapon. But, the European empire builders of France, England, Spain – and the U.S. wannabes – were not going to give up, even though they all had been defeated, or were afraid to directly intervene (in the case of the U.S.).

As it turned out, however, with Toussaint – backed by the 'revolutionary' army – assuming the governance of the island, the imperialists pressured and maneuvered him into a position where he and his (dragon) army began to impose intolerable conditions on the revolutionary masses of workers. And, "in the north around Plaisance, Limbe, Dondon, the vanguard [masses] of the revolution was not satisfied with the new regime" (James, 275-276). And astonishingly, in the teeth of Napoleon's renewed threats and the hostile machinations of the British and Americans, "Toussaint submits, along with his generals" (James, 325-327).

Thus, at one swell swoop, these leaders had been forced to play the role of neo-colonial compradors, our dragon had been cor-

who have always been diehard operators of illegal liquor stills, and who nowadays are major marijuana growers. Yet, the primary difference between today's hillbillies and the white Maroons of the Dismal Swamp (up until the end of the Civil War) is that the latter were the close and trusted allies of the African and Amerindian Maroons.

So, up until 1776 the Dismal Swamp Maroons lived as free people, protected by the harshness of the swamp and well organized and capable defenders from amongst their collective ranks: each Maroon settlement had its own armed members that were responsible for patrolling its surroundings, warning of intruders, decoying or attacking any hostiles- while giving the other Maroons enough time to escape to other pre-planned and built up settlements. And in the event of sustained, heavy searches by outside militia, poses or bounty hunters, the Maroons had gradually evolved a system of coordinating their defenses and a unified command structure – which was known to have been headed by individuals from all of the various racial and ethnic groups-- and which saw its mission as one of driving the hostiles out of the swamp, or outlasting any intrusion. An attack of that nature was dealt with as an attack on all!

Moreover, within the swamp, the Maroons were unbeatable! The swamp itself was so treacherous until it could not be traveled without fear of being swallowed up at every turn. There were fast moving rivers concealed by thick vegetation, quicksand, heavy undergrowth encased mud, deadly sharp thickets and concealed protuberances, poisonous insects, snakes, reptiles, alligators and big cats. Then, there was the Maroon laid snares and traps, along with the possibility of being ambushed by the Maroon guerillas who would lead pursuers into even more treacherous terrain that only they knew how to traverse. In fact, the Maroons developed and passed down effective ways to cross otherwise un-crossable terrain by using methods certain animals would employ.

Remember, we're talking about a swamp that was one hundred miles one way, and sixty miles the other... The bottom line is, at no point in recorded history did outsiders succeed in capturing or killing all or even substantial numbers of the Dismal Swamp Maroons, or forcing them out of their lair. The outsiders even tried to drain sections of the swamp for commercial and travel reasons, but even that left an area almost the size of a small state.

Therefore, when the colonists' efforts to shake off England in their so-called War of Independence reached the swamp, both sides found fully trained and tested militias among the Maroons. Only one side, however, offered anything of value. England, through its loyalists in Virginia and the Carolinas let it be known that anyone fighting for the British would be guaranteed freedom from slavery and indentured servitude, and could also look forward to dividing up some of the estates of any plantation owners in rebellion.

So, once the word got around, literally tens of thousands answered England's call: Maroons, enslaved individuals from the plantations and towns, and poor whites who wanted to help break the strangle hold that the plantation elites had on the south.

The Dismal Swamp was not the only place that Maroons could be found. There were, astonishingly enough, thousands upon thousands of other Maroons all throughout the backwoods and foothills of all of the states from Delaware to Georgia (Florida is a special case that will be discussed later). All characteristically living in fiercely independent and semi-outlaw states, some the forefathers and mothers of the Appalachian hillbillies. Huge numbers of them, consequently, answered England's call and eventually received arms and went on to fight the entire war on England's side.

Although most of today's "teachers" of history are fond of reminding everyone that Blacks provided over five thousand fighters to the colonist cause during that struggle, they hardly ever highlight that at least ten times that number fought for England. Or more accurately, fought to get the plantation ruling-elite and their followers off of their backs and out of power. Saying 50,000 plus Blacks fought for England is not historically correct. However it can be said that those 50,000 plus Africans, Amerindians, whites and mixed race individuals' aspirations were closer to those of the overwhelming majority of the enslaved and oppressed Blacks of their time – then to the rest of the colonial society.

Even so, England was forced to grant the colonists independence – not due to losing the war in most of the areas that saw massive Maroon participation (southern Virginia to Georgia), but because George Washington and his army held on in the northern states until France joined the war on their side. Afterwards, Washington and the French naval fleet trapped a major British force at Yorktown, Virginia* causing England to abandon the fight in the colonies in order to better carry out its worldwide struggle with France and other European imperial powers. So, when the Eng-

guerilla raids to Mackandal's poisoning). But the Maroons were not strong enough to take on the entire French colony as Mackandal's people had.

By that time, in just about all of the areas, original Amerindians had been exterminated, only to be replaced by an endless supply of enslaved Africans. The latter produced so much sugar and other agriculture crops that San Domingo became the crown jewel of the French empire and the backbone of the French economy. So Mackandal's terror campaigns were quickly pushed to the back of the exploiters' minds.

But within two years of the outbreak of the French revolution, and the subsequent turmoil caused by it in that colonial possession, a new generation stepped into Mackandal's shoes.

One dark night, a large assembly of the colony's Africans met at a secret ceremony; both enslaved workers and Maroon guerillas met on a mountain outside of town. They represented thousands of other Africans – both on the many plantations and in the fugitive communities in the mountains. The ceremony and last minute plans were being overseen by Boukman and an enslaved female – they were both Vodun (Voodoo) spiritual leaders. There was no need to haggle over any last minute plans. They knew better than Karl Marx's (later) "wage slaves" that "they had nothing to lose but their chains." And the horrible treatment that their 'masters' heaped on them added a sense of desperation for them to kill or be killed once they revolted.

Yet, Boukman and the female offered more inspiration than centralized leadership. And when the revolt was launched shortly thereafter, it was led by scores of decentralized bands of African workers, Maroon guerrilla groups– who were all joined shortly thereafter by separate Mulatto-led groups.

Before the well-known Toussaint L'Overture came on the stage, the Haitian revolution was being led by figures that the decentralized groups propelled forward: the Maroons Jean Francois, Bissou and Lamour Derance, and the rebel enslaved workers Romaine the Prophetess and Hyacinthe the fearless leader of the battle of Croix des Bouquets. And the Mulattos had a number of their own independent groups and distinguished leaders plus there was also a small segment of whites who were in league with the anti-slavery wing of the French Jacobins, and who loosely allied themselves with one rebel group or another.

of their ancestors.

Haiti

The history of Haiti provides an excellent laboratory in which to test my thesis. What would become the country of Haiti was once known as San Domingo or Saint Domingo, the western part of the island of Hispanola in the Caribbean. Today the country of the Dominican Republic occupies the larger eastern part of the island.

There, between 1791 and 1804, we witness one of the most titanic struggles ever engaged in between (enslaved) workers and their overlords. It is through an examination of the events surrounding that struggle that we can clearly measure the strengths and weaknesses of our dragon and hydra: centralized and decentralized forces of change. Here is a much neglected goldmine of historical contribution to our search for historical lessons – on par with the great French revolution of 1789.

For generations prior to the French revolution – that set the stage for the Haitian revolt two years later – Maroon guerrillas and communities had been operating throughout the entire island of Hispanola. And later many of their descendants would distinguish themselves amongst the multitudes of the little known heroic figures of those times. Most notably, the intrepid Mackandal, in the pre-revolutionary period (CA 1750s), organized and led a select group of African Maroons and enslaved plantation workers in a conspiracy designed to overthrow the French and colonial powers by massive and bewildering use of a vast array of poisons: against individuals, livestock, supplies, water and any African workers who were believed to be sympathetic to, or in league with, the French.

After years of terrorizing the island, Mackandal slipped up and was betrayed and subsequently burnt at the stake, fatally crippling his tightly organized, centralized movement. Mackandal's highly centralized group was so dependent on him and a select cadre of others that the French imperialists were successful in fatally crippling the entire movement, after unspeakable tortures had exposed them.

They were all publicly tortured, maimed, and finally killed in the most gruesome ways as a terrifying warning that had the effect of smothering outward resistance, although Africans continued to flow and take refuge amongst the Maroons (the latter preferred

the British navy evacuated what would become the United States, within its ships were hundreds of Maroons and their families. They were transported to English controlled islands in the Caribbean and to Canada. Thus, today one can find their descendants in places like Nova Scotia and the Bahamas.

Of course, although their cause was not successful outside of the Dismal Swamp, the surviving Maroons had absolutely no intention of becoming slaves! The Maroons, therefore, retreated back into their all but impregnable fortress within the swamp. Others migrated further south to join up with the Maroons already in Florida, or the French claimed lands as far west as present day Louisiana; others still went into the Appalachians, mixing with the Amerindians there or trying to live as cut off from the dominant white controlled society as possible. Consequently, between the end of the Revolutionary War and the start of the Civil War, the Dismal Swamp Maroons held onto their freedom inside of the swamp redoubt.

It was later discovered, moreover, that the Maroons who lived inside of the deepest sections of the swamp had located enough dry grounds to build any number of settlements that included well constructed living quarters and systems of log covered and otherwise concealed pathways. Some of these homes, nevertheless, were built on high platforms for protection from wild animals and sudden changes in the swamp's water level. Furthermore, enough useful ground was found in order to plant crops and grow food, which, in addition to their fishing, hunting and trapping, allowed them to independently sustain their food needs.

On the other hand, the white Maroons living on the edges of the swamp relied on its still heavy undergrowth to conceal their homes which were usually separate structures connected by winding, all but invisible pathways. An outsider could travel through these areas and never run into their dwellings.

As mentioned, those in the interior and those on the edges of the swamp cooperated in facilitating trade with the surrounding white dominated society. This means of sustenance was maintained in addition to a certain amount of brigandage, mainly cattle rustling, for which the Maroons had bred a ferocious line of dogs. Needless to say, the collective Maroons under no circumstances would allow their people to go without the things needed to remain alive and safe, even if that meant mounting larger raids on the surrounding areas and coping with the resulting intensified searches of

the swamp.

But mostly, from the end of the Revolutionary War up until the Civil War, the thousands of Maroons known to occupy the swamp lived an independent existence, only periodically interrupted by mostly futile incursions and searches by posses, militias or bounty hunters.

Freedom fighter Nat Turner and his rebels were headed for the Virginia side of the swamp, but their rebellion was suppressed before they could get there (although some may have made it). More than anything, the Dismal Swamp of those times was viewed and accepted like it was a foreign, independent, hostile territory. A place, above all, never to venture into for fear of its fabled terrain and illusive, crafty and untamed inhabitants. A “spooky place,” or so the surrounding enslaved Blacks were taught to believe, which over time kept most of them from seeking refuge there amongst the Maroons. Thus, the losses that the plantations elites suffered because of the Maroon presence in the swamp were not enough to alter their course, so they came to accept and absorb what they couldn't otherwise change.

When the cataclysmic events surrounding the beginning of the Civil War reached the Maroons of the Dismal Swamp, a new generation of Maroon guerrillas thrust themselves forward and almost immediately began to play a little known strategic role against the slave holding system. Emerging from the North Carolina side of the swamp, in particular, the Maroon fighters would eventually become so numerous and militarily powerful that they totally dominated and controlled whole counties and areas of the state. Of note here would be Henry Berry Lowery, a Black who was one of their most effective leaders. After recruiting heavily amongst other Blacks and Amerindians, mounted on fast horses, his forces would dominate large sections of the state for ten years, even after the war was over.

How, one may ask, could that happen in the very heart of the south?

It is true that since the end of the Revolutionary War the Maroons were never numerous or militarily strong enough to venture out of the swamp - except by stealth, or during quick pinpoint raids. The Civil War, however, forced the majority of the white males who supported the slave system to join the fight against the Union Army elsewhere. Assuredly, it was believed enough able-

trol, nor use, to increase their power; thus the ‘trash’ label. And later the hillbilly label and imagery were used to similarly isolate those runaways who moved into the southern Appalachian mountains to also escape their former indentured status. Both segments were staunch enemies of the imperialists and colonists, who many times allied with Africans and Amerindians, also fugitives from enslavement. At times, these three groups formed tri-racial Maroon communities. At other times, they were firmly allied, though living separately— except in the case of the Amerindians and Africans who mixed freely.

Consequently, from the 17th century until the abolition of slavery in the U.S., there were also Maroon communities in areas stretching from the pine barrens of New Jersey, down the east coast to Florida, and in the Appalachian mountains and later to migrate to Mexico's northern border regions. The best known (but little studied) ones were those that occupied the dismal swamp of Virginia and North Carolina and the Seminoles of Florida, which contrary to popular belief have never been an Amerindian tribe, but instead – from their beginnings – an ethnic group made up of Africans and Amerindians who came together to form the ethnicity: just like the Boni Maroons were formed in Suriname.

All of this replicated the decentralized organizing forms of the Maroons in Suriname and Jamaica. And although their political histories fall short of them winning and maintaining the degree of autonomy achieved in Suriname or Jamaica, the descendants of the Seminoles in Mexico and the U.S. still fiercely guard their communities against the Mexican and U.S. governments: in Florida they're recognized as a semi-autonomous tribe, and the Africans (Seminoles negroes) in Oklahoma, Texas and Mexico also distinguish themselves from their neighbors— while calling Blacks in the U.S. ‘state negroes.’ According to New Afrikan nationalist cadre from the U.S. who have worked around them, the African Seminoles never considered themselves citizens of the U.S. like African Americans do.

Finally, the legendary history and present posture of the people of the Southern Appalachians – in still refusing to fully integrate into the fabric of the U.S. – rests more on a forgotten history of their ancestors' struggle to remain free from any servitude or domination, than they or we understand. Instead, we've adopted the bourgeoisie myth about them being hopelessly backwards and ultraracist, although in reality true hillbilly culture and practice is really isolationist and independent, reflecting the autonomist spirit

Even so, from then until our time, the descendents of those remaining Maroon communities in Jamaica still continue to occupy the lands they fought on, and they've never recognized any overlords; neither the later British or black governments!

The United States

It's ironic that those of us who live in the U.S. continue to neglect to thoroughly study and critique the wealth of documented history about the anti-imperialist and anti-expansionist struggles that have occurred here since the Europeans first started colonizing this area, other than the well-known Native American suppression and genocide.

Like the volumes of works written about the Civil Rights, Black Liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, the early Labor Movement, Womyn's Suffrage Movement, Abolitionist Movement and Reconstruction period, there's a mountain of other revolutionary material we can learn from. And not surprisingly, that information concerns the struggles of enslaved workers on these shores prior to the abolition of chattel slavery. In fact, it mirrors the already mentioned struggles in Suriname and Jamaica, with the important distinction that it encompasses multi-racial aspects – more so than either of the former cases. Namely, in the U.S. – until the abolition of slavery – Africans, Amerindians and Europeans (in some areas) allied themselves to fight against the imperialist and expansionist powers. That phenomenon was also evident in the Caribbean and South America, but due to the large percentages of enslaved Africans, compared to enslaved Amerindians and Europeans, most of those struggles were primarily between the enslaved Africans and the European imperialists.

Thus today in the U.S., such emotionally charged epithets as hillbilly and poor white trash are totally divorced from their historical roots. The first people to be labeled as such were the descendents of the indentured European workers, who had escaped that status and allied themselves with both the Amerindian and Africans who had also escaped from slavery or servitude, all of whom combined into Maroon communities in areas that are now a part of the United States.

Initially, the derogatory 'poor white trash' label was reserved for the rebellious, unexploitable and non-conformist early Europeans who the colonial and imperial elites could neither con-

bodied men would be left behind to keep enslaved Blacks docile and terrorized. While that might have worked for a while, the Maroons expanded their numbers by recruiting among Amerindians, fed up "poor whites" and other Blacks who were beginning to flee in larger parties. Plus, one must remember that all of the Maroons were past masters at using guerilla tactics: concealment, living off the land, improvising traps and deadly snares, the ambush, lightening raids and retreats. Plus, after proving their fighting qualities, they could gradually depend on more and more of the enslaved Blacks, poor whites and Amerindians providing them food, information about the weaknesses of the whites protecting slavery, munitions and recruits.

So within two years of the outbreak of the war, the Maroons had pulled together enough fighters to soundly defeat all of the slavers' available forces. The slavers, in fact, sent official documents to the Confederate government announcing their complete withdrawal from their cause and the Civil War all together! Afterwards, in those "liberated areas," the Maroons and their allies set up a rudimentary framework for a new social order... that the rest of the South would not know until the Reconstruction era.

Even so, in other areas of North Carolina and Virginia the Maroons faced stiffer resistance. On the Virginia side of the swamp, undoubtedly, they had to be more aggressively combative simply because of the swamp's closeness to the heart of Confederate productions at Portsmouth, and not far from their seat of government in Richmond. The latter, in particular, was always simultaneously being threatened by strong Union forces.

Therefore, those Maroons were able to tie down and neutralize sizeable numbers of Confederate troops through the use of their well honed guerilla hit-and-run tactics. The Maroons, even when unable to defeat the Confederates militarily, still found other ways to strategically undermine their war effort, the morale of the troops and their entire infrastructure. Due to their effective use of the Dismal Swamp, any Confederate officer worth his weight in salt knew not to send his men into Maroon territory!

Certainly, the Maroons' most effective blows came from their helping to liberate multitudes of enslaved Blacks! That is a subject that's rarely written about. But, if one wants to understand where the tens of thousands of mostly Black Union soldiers emerged from, in those dark days when the North needed a lot of fresh troops in order to break the Confederates' will, then turn to

the so-called “contrabands,” which were the thousands upon thousands of enslaved Blacks who were running away from bondage. Indeed, these contrabands provided the overwhelming majority of the two hundred thousand Blacks who fought for the Union, and the Maroons of North Carolina and Virginia played a major role in that undertaking.

Just imagine all of Harriet Tubman’s exploits in liberating hundreds of captives, combined with John Brown’s vision of the wholesale running off of captives with the guns taken in his failed raid at Harper’s Ferry, then multiply that hundreds of times... only then is it possible to grasp the magnitude of the numbers of captives run off by the Maroons.

Secondarily, their experience in cattle rustling was put to such good use, until the Confederacy in their areas of operation began to suffer starvation. True to their loyalties, the white Maroons who joined the Union force fought in the segregated “colored” units, although they didn’t have to.

After the end of the war, the Maroons would fully emerge from the swamp and play important roles in local affairs. Certainly, once one becomes knowledgeable of the hidden parts of history, s/he can better understand just why a country dominated by a white supremacist culture and institutions would go out of its way to keep it undercover.

The Seminole

Let’s examine another perfidious example of mass deception and miseducation surrounding this subject, namely, the so-called Seminole Wars.

Scholars inform us that the word Seminole comes from the Creek Indian “simano-li,” meaning “fugitive” or wild. Furthermore, although later it would apply to an entire ethnic group, originally - get this - it was used by Creeks to describe fugitive or runaway enslaved Africans, in particular, those Africans escaping through Creek country to reach the “sanctuary” of Spanish held Florida in the 1700’s. By then, a section of the Creeks were breaking off from the main body and also making their way there. The African Seminoles (who the Spanish dubbed Negro Seminoles) were already there - so the ethnic name is as much rightly theirs as the Amerindian Seminoles.

enslavers of the British Empire. After generations of unsuccessful campaigns by the British against the Maroon guerrillas, they too hit upon the necessity of trying to divide the fighting Maroons from their main source of new recruits: the enslaved African workers. So the British offered the Maroons ‘treaties’ similar to those in Suriname.

To force the British to adopt such methods, the Maroons fought tenaciously, skillfully and bravely for over 100 years! And even though there (also) we witness a number of decentralized groups, they roughly became to be recognized as the Windward and Leeward Maroons: the former located in the eastern (windward) end of Jamaica, and the latter on the westward (leeward) side. And history records the most noted Maroon of the Windwards as an African womyn named Granny Nanny – who even had a town named after her in the Maroon’s liberated territory. Indeed, Nanny Town became the center of the resistance to British plantation imperialism in Jamaica, the headquarters from which the Maroon bands almost succeeded in driving all of the imperialists from the island altogether – even though British soldiers captured and burned Nanny Town on a number of occasions.

The dominant personality amongst the Leewards was an African man named Kodjo. History records Kodjo as leading a tightly controlled and centralized operation. When the Windwards had to make a trek across the island during one fierce suppression effort, seeking the Leewards help, even Kodjo could not force them to abandon their autonomy.

Telling, it was Granny Nanny who led a segment of decentralized Windwards to resist signing the treaties the longest. She went as far as to have the British envoys killed on more than one occasion, and only submitted after Kodjo and all of the male Maroon heads had capitulated.

After that, these Maroons were used to help the British hunt and capture new runaways, as well as suppress revolts amongst the still enslaved African workers; although they fiercely clung to the freedom and autonomy they and their ancestors had fought for!

In fact, over a generation later their descendents would again engage the British in the Trelawny War in the middle of the 1790s, during which a mere 267 Maroon guerillas fought thousands of British soldiers, local militia and enslaved Africans to a complete stand still. They, however, were also tricked and placed on boats to be deported to Canada – and later to Africa after accepting a truce.

they could use to supplement their diets.

Dutch soldiers recorded discovering Boni and related Maroon fields that took them an hour one way and 30 minutes the other way to mark off for destruction, along with so many domesticated chickens they had to slaughter the excess after feasting on them for days. They and their Maroon foes always noted how much better the Maroons were fed, and how much better physical specimens the Maroons showed themselves to be. It became a prime motivator of the Dutch-led troops to hunt for and locate Maroon food stores and farm animals in order to supplement their own poor diets.

During the Dutch's final major campaign in the second Boni war, an expeditionary force of 1600 Dutch regulars and European mercenaries, accompanied by thousands more Colonial soldiers and enslaved African workers and 'free negro rangers' was also unsuccessful, causing the commander to return to Europe with less than a dozen of his force he'd led to Suriname; and to die himself within a year.

From then until the ending of slavery, the Dutch relied on treachery, trying to manipulate the various treaties and (still) fighting Maroons against each other. And although they did succeed in getting a younger, less-experienced generation of treaty Maroons to assassinate Boni, Chief Puja and Kormantin Kodjo (who were old men, who had turned over their leadership to younger maroons), the other fighting Maroons continued to exercise their autonomy until slavery was abolished. And today the Boni Maroons still live autonomously in Suriname proper, where there's more than 70 thousand direct descendants of the 'bush negroes.'

The Dutch imperialists tried their best to slay the Hydra! They failed. Was it because the Maroons decentralized formations prevented the Dutch from concentrating their superior resources against any one centralized leadership – any bright star? I think so.

Have the various bush negroe ethnicities been able to maintain their autonomy over hundreds of years, against all oppressive forces, through their refusal to allow themselves to be subjected by any broad centralizing forces? I think so again.

Jamaica

Across the Caribbean from Suriname – in Jamaica – from as early as the 1650s there developed similar decentralized Maroon communities, only there they were fighting against the local

Thus, it's totally wrong to see Seminoles as Amerindians who befriended and mixed with Africans. Instead, they are the result of a coming together of the two to form the ethnicity. Apparently, they eventually came together in Florida because they both needed the help of the other; in defense from slave catchers and other Creeks not content with the separation.

To better grasp the deceit that continues to surround our subject we have to closely examine what the Seminoles are best known for: the First and Second Seminole Wars. The first ended in 1819, and the second lasted from 1835-1842. In truth, there were other Seminole Wars.

Everyone is led to accept the misleading title Seminole Wars, when in reality they started as slave catching expeditions, and that always played a major role in the conflicts. This is because the expanding plantation slave holders could no longer tolerate a sanctuary for their runaways in Florida. Over and over their emissaries and military commanders made it crystal clear to the Amerindian Seminoles that if they would detach themselves from the African Seminoles, they would no longer be a party in the wars. Yet in popular depictions, most literature, docudramas and movies, one can hardly read about or see a Black person...

At the same time, the United States government eventually joined forces with the slavers and expanded the venture into a land grab. In fact, they had long been uncomfortable with Spain occupying the Florida peninsula, and after it changed hands with England several times, the latter using the panhandle as a military base in the War of 1812, by 1815 they decided to do something drastic about it.

So, they sent Indian killer Andrew Jackson to Florida to start the First Seminole War. That said, the country's archives contain many of Jackson's own letters clearly spelling out his two-fold mission of capturing runaway slaves, and forcing Spain to give up Florida all together. He failed to capture any significant number of runaways, but was successful in starting the war, and thereafter Spain was forced to "sell" Florida to the U.S. in 1819. The collective Seminoles, however, never gave into Jackson and his soldiers; fighting pitched battles and eventually a guerilla war until Jackson finally just withdrew most of his troops - and simply proclaimed victory. Sound familiar? For their part, the Seminoles just migrated to areas not under control of the forces Jackson left behind; which was just about everywhere but a few growing towns and the few that

Spain had founded. Consequently, until the outbreak of the Second Seminole War, African and Amerindian Seminoles built their own towns and settlements all over the rest of Florida. In addition, they again established a strong agriculture and livestock base to sustain themselves with, and for trade.

Usually, Africans and Amerindians lived in separate town and settlements. Thus, the admixture between them never reached the degree that it did in the Dismal Swamp. Nevertheless, they still intermarried, and one of those mixed marriages was to play a strategic role in later events. In addition, since the U.S. had nominal control of the peninsula, plantation owners began to acquire unused land and bring in enslaved Africans, while even a substantial number from there and out of state tried to get long held fugitive slave warrants served on African Seminoles, claiming to have owned their ancestors - and by law them too.

Spain had, however, granted their ancestors freedom, in return for serving on the border militia. Therefore the African and Amerindian Seminoles began the practice of “adopting” each other as nominal slave and slave owner. That practice all but put a halt to the prosecuting of most of those old warrants, for which the Africans gave some crops to the Amerindians for the service, but otherwise were totally free. Moreover, both groups continued to peacefully coexist as they always had.

Still, things could not remain in that position for two primary reasons. The plantation owners wanted to expand throughout the area, and the peninsula was still a sanctuary for “new” runaways from the local plantations and the neighboring states of Georgia and Alabama. In fact, to get a clearer picture, one must see Florida as a base from which fugitive Africans would carry on a low level guerilla war with the neighboring areas for the purpose of rescuing their loved ones still in bondage, and in encouraging others to join and strengthen their ranks - for over 100 years! Complicating things for the slavers was the fact that nothing seemed to shake the African/Amerindian Seminole alliance.

Picture this: American emissaries and other government officials trying to negotiate slave catching arrangements with Amerindian Seminole chiefs, who had African Seminole interpreters and advisors. In addition, the absurdity of trying to get certain chiefs to agree to turn over Africans whom they had known all their lives, some of whom were relatives, many who had been comrades in arms, and who the chiefs had otherwise only known as free indi-

agreed upon during the periodic sit-downs between the parties. The underlying objectives of the imperialists were to both rid themselves of a dangerous enemy and turn them into valuable allies.

Yet once it became known to the still enslaved African workers that they could no longer rely on the Njuka, Saramaka and Matawai for refuge and protection, they began to seek out smaller Maroon concentrations. In the early 1700s, one of those small groups was headed by an African named Asikan Silvester. Born into this group was a child called Boni. His mother was a fugitive African and his father either African or Amerindian. Subsequently, the group chose Boni to be its new head, after Asikan became too old to serve in that position. This group of Maroons would eventually become known to the Dutch as a new center of resistance, and for the next two generations Boni would lead them, and they would be known to history as the Boni Maroons – becoming an ethnicity. Thus, the Boni Maroons just replicated what the imperialists thought they were suppressing by the signing of the treaties with the other Maroons. Consequently, they would not sign any more treaties with either the Boni’s or any other Maroons – up until the end of the slave period. Boni – for his part – would lead his group to aggressively wage war on the imperialists until his death in his mid-sixties.

Yet even while the Boni’s became the main fighting force amongst all of those Maroons who were still at war with the Dutch, they still observed and respected the democratic wishes of any fugitives or Maroon groups they dealt with; never trying to centralize all control in their hands. Although they were past masters in the use of coordinated guerilla campaigns amongst all of the decentralized groups – during which a unified command was essential – they still never demanded that everyone integrate themselves into the Boni community; or put themselves directly under Boni outside of when participating in agreed-upon guerilla campaigns and during raids. Thus, the Dutch recorded their knowledge of the frequent coming together of the decentralized fighters of Kormantin Kodjo, Chief Puja, Boni and Baron during large campaigns, while separating and remaining decentralized and autonomous otherwise.

Unlike the ‘treaty Maroons,’ they never became dependent upon the imperialists for anything, instead relying on their raiding capabilities to capture guns, powder, cannons, and other useful items. Moreover, they had perfected methods of large-scale open field agriculture that allowed them to raise harvest and store more food than they could consume – along with more farm animals than

Even as this is written they remain autonomous from the government of Suriname – which gained its independence from the Netherlands – whose Dutch ancestors we’re discussing in 1975. In fact, the descendents of the early Maroons were again forced to fight another guerilla war against the newly-independent government in 1980: a successful effort on the part of the Maroons to maintain their autonomy and control over the lands they’ve historically occupied.

Their decentralized methods had their drawbacks. Their enemies in the imperialist camp were able to manipulate various Maroon communities into signing ‘treaties’ that gave those communities their freedom from enslavement and land to use – in exchange for them cooperating in the hunting down and capturing of other fugitives. By doing that, the enslavers could avoid the all but useless wars designed to capture or kill the skillful Maroon guerrillas, and everyone on the Maroon communities fell in that category: at the drop of a hat, the women and children in those communities could pack their belongings and escape to pre-arranged and built-up alternative settlements, while the men (and some women) busied themselves in fighting rear guard actions against the pursuing colonial soldiers.

It turns out, however, that although the treaties did solve some of the imperialist’s problems, the Suriname Maroons never really fulfilled their obligations to help the imperialists hunt and capture other Maroons. A narrative of the Dutch forces’ generations-long wars designed to either capture or kill the Boni Maroons is instructive in that regard (see *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname*).

By the mid-18th century, the Dutch had been forced by over a century of Maroon guerilla warfare to sign treaties with three of the most powerful Maroon communities: the Ndjuka, Saramaka and the Matawai. All of these Maroon communities had evolved over generations from fugitive African – from any different backgrounds – into new ethnicities which adopted the already mentioned names. Most importantly, they had soundly defeated all of the imperialist forces fielded to capture or kill them, while continuing to expand their numbers and offer an evergrowing threat to the Dutch colony.

The treaties came with yearly ‘gifts’ of all kinds that the Dutch would deliver to the Maroons: textiles, pots and pans, guns, powder, axes, knives, mirrors, nails, liquor and just about anything

viduals - but since their ancestors had escaped slavery, they were now also supposed to be slaves and turned over to strangers... Finally, and this must be emphasized due to our own racial fears, there was a lot of selfless love between the African and Amerindian Seminoles... not lip service love, but the kind of love that manifests itself in situations that endanger lives!

A clear example of the latter was the “blood pact” entered into by both parties - at the prodding of Africans - that dictated that any Amerindian Seminole who tried to deliver an African into slavery was to be killed by their own people. History’s most recognized Amerindian Seminole, Osceola, showed where he stood by killing a powerful Amerindian Seminole chief when it was discovered that the latter had broken the pact. Afterwards, and until his death, Osceola would be held in high esteem by the Africans, and when he was captured during the war, it was discovered that his personal guards were mostly African Seminoles.

Earlier, Osceola was married to an African woman who was separated from him and put into chains during the couple’s visit to a U.S. government settlement. He was also jailed briefly, while his wife was sold into slavery and transported north.

This state of affairs came to a head in 1835, when a U.S. Army commander’s plan to capture some Africans backfired when the guide, an enslaved African, led his soldiers into a prearranged trap. In the ensuing bloody encounter, an entire company of over one hundred American army soldiers were killed. The African Seminoles suffered only slightly. Almost at the same time, Osceola and other warriors ambushed and killed the government official who had ordered the enslavement of his wife. Thereafter, all over the peninsula Seminoles opened generalized warfare against the U.S. government, and all those believed to be in league with them

The collective Seminoles, though extremely capable fighters when employing guerilla tactics, still found themselves hard pressed when the U.S. sent in massive numbers of army, marine and navy troops, along with thousands of state militia, mercenaries, settlers, slave catchers and adventurers. In particular, the Seminole women and children suffered terribly from the constant fighting and movement. Yet, for seven years they fought on.

In a testament to the resiliency of the African/Amerindian alliance and ties, neither group ever fell victim to ploys to divide them. In fact, they fought successive American commanders and new infusions of troops to a stand still, forcing the last commander

to reject all direction and advice from Washington and the slavers, and instead concentrate his efforts on trying to get the collective Seminoles to agree to migrate to Oklahoma territory, where they could occupy lands in close proximity to other Amerindian ethnic groups who had also been forced to leave the east coast: the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and their kin, the Creeks.

Wisely, the last commander also ignored the insistence of the plantation owners that he use his soldiers and sailors to insure that the fugitive slave warrants were served on any of the African Seminoles. Instead, he either got the U.S. government to pay the slavers out of tax monies, or more often than not, he just had his junior officers “cook the books” allowing any Amerindian Seminoles who were willing to migrate to “adopt” African Seminoles as their alleged property” and take them with them. Overriding all criticisms, he roughly rebuked all naysayers by noting that the last thing needed on a plantation was a veteran African Seminole warrior! Even so, the commander had to transport respected African and Amerindian Seminoles west to inspect the new settlements, and on their return, they had to painstakingly locate the Seminoles guerilla hideouts and convince them to migrate.

As is well known, nevertheless, the U.S. could never fully dislodge all of the Seminoles. So, once again, they just declared victory, ended all hostilities with the remaining Seminoles (whose direct descendants are still in Florida), and got on with establishing plantation based slavery all around them.

Was the struggle against slavery over for the African Seminoles? Hardly! In fact, as soon as the collective Seminoles began arriving in the allotted Oklahoma areas, other slave holders and former mercenary war veterans who had fought with the Americans in Florida began their own efforts to try to serve fugitive warrants against African Seminoles. After a couple of near showdowns, most of the collective Seminoles left Oklahoma for Mexico. On the way, thanks to their finely honed survival and fighting skills, they were able to fend off attacks by hostile Amerindians and whites alike. So, since Mexico had already abolished slavery, they applied for asylum and some land to work. For their part, the Mexican government was glad to have them in their border regions - having learned of their legendary fighting abilities during their recent war with the U.S. Thus, the Mexican government offered them large tracts of unused land, if they would agree to protect that section of their border from both marauding Amerindians and whites from Texas. Both the Af-

slaved workers.

Be that as it may, almost from the first importation of enslaved Africans, there developed a tradition of flight from slavery: Africans ran away to the forests, swamps and highlands. These fugitives came to be known as Bosch Creoles: Dutch for Bush Creoles, or “born in the forest” and later bush negroes, who we’ll call Maroons throughout our study, as a generic name that has come to be used as an accepted way to describe fugitive, enslaved people throughout the western hemisphere.

Throughout the western hemisphere, we witness these collective Maroons developing and using a very effective form of decentralized organizing that not only served to help them defeat their former enslavers, but has helped them remain autonomous from all unwanted overseers for hundreds of years – until our time.

It must be recalled that the Suriname Africans were from many different backgrounds, so when they would come together as Maroons that would have to be factored in. They had to organize using democratic methods, and the glue that held them together was their collective focus on defeating their enslavers’ attempts to control them; that centralized their efforts.

There remained, however, one class of their communities who did not fit into that category: those Africans who did not flee, but were forced by maroon raiders to leave the plantations. They did not enjoy a say in their communities’ affairs until they had proven themselves.

But as a general rule, individuals and small groups would flee the plantations to join the Maroons, and on occasions large conspiracies were organized that saw the enslaved workers preparing the ground work for maroon guerrillas to raid plantations and liberate scores at a time.

This example exhibits decisions arrived at by truly democratic means, and then carried out in a centralized manner, all done by otherwise decentralized groups. Long before our later Bolsheviks!

Over a 150 year period, the various Maroon communities of Suriname would wage a guerrilla war with the Dutch and English slavers to remain free. Today in Suriname their direct descendants still occupy the areas their ancestors fought on, and most of them have never suffered under slavery – even before the U.S. signed its own Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Caribbean and other places in the world.

The Dutch West Indies Company was one of the first, and a major corporation in the world. And in Suriname, it launched plantation-based production of cash crops on a large scale, using enslaved workers imported from different parts of Africa. Added to that were a number of other plantations run by other European 'entrepreneurs,' along with their overseers, shop-keepers, militias, artisans, administrators, bureaucrats and sailors, and a small percentage of (mostly) poor white women who had been exiled from Europe.

Compared to the enslaved Africans and the suppressed Amerindians, one could compare everyone else – but the small number of plantation operating entrepreneurs and administrators – with what we today recognize as the technologically-advanced countries' labor aristocracy and petty bourgeoisie with those elements being fully dependent for their livelihood and protection of their persons and property, from the enslaved workers and remaining indigenous people, on the Dutch military, militias, the imperial court and the big mercantilists.

I made those comparisons because we all too often fail to point out that the enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic to assume the role of workers, and just about everyone else associated with their plight were also – first and foremost – other workers, similar to our plight today. And the issue of race did not – could not – change that basic fact! So keep that in mind as we develop this work.

Amongst the Africans were many different ethnic groups from different areas of the continent, all speaking different languages and with many varied religious and cultural practices. To give an idea of the stratification of these Africans, the fact that they all had dark skins meant next to nothing to them in terms of solidarity. Where they originally came from everybody had dark skin: friends and enemies alike! Further, it was the practice of the plantation owners to try to purchase workers from different backgrounds in order to keep them divided as much as possible. And because the work was so brutal and the food was so inadequate, most plantations were really death camps, where the African workers were literally worked to death in a few years, only to be replaced with newly-imported enslaved workers, who would also go on to make handsome profits for the owners. Thus, the turnover itself was a powerful check on the formation of any solidarity between the en-

rican and Amerindian Seminoles agreed, and up until the end of the American Civil War 20 years later and the abolition of slavery, they effectively protected the area, while otherwise establishing secure and productive settlements.

After the Civil War, however, many of the collective Seminoles returned and settled in the U.S. Regrettably, the African Seminoles lent their superior tracking skills to the U.S. Army's Buffalo Soldiers, and both of these Black descendants of enslaved people aided the U.S. in the near destruction on the Southwest Amerindians- a very shameful episode in an otherwise illustrious history.

That aside, the Seminole Wars, in particular the Second Seminole War, remains as a shining example of diverse peoples coming together to resist and over come everything in their path - in defeating attempts to impose the barbaric system of chattel slavery on the members.

Finally, out of the daily retelling of the fabled renditions of America's "cowboys and Indians" and "Fort Apache" style fair, you have to be a scholar to learn that out of all of America's so called Indian Wars, the Second Seminole War was the most costly to them in both human and material losses! Plus, it's probably the only one they cannot boast of winning!

But, of course it really wasn't just an Indian War, was it? So why talk about it?! Today, the Seminoles' descendants can be found in Oklahoma, Texas and Mexico. All still fiercely proud of their distinct history and heritage, with many still speaking their own pidgin dialects and practicing their own customs.

The Underground Railroad

The storied and much celebrated Underground Railroad (U.G.R.R) is another subject that still demands study in order to more firmly grasp it's magnitude, historical significance and to determine what lessons it holds that we may be failing to come to grips with.

Here we will examine:

- It's dimensions & It's defiance of the government and popular sentiments
- Why it was one of the two main causes of the Civil War and the "emancipation" of the enslaved Blacks.

Submerged in a welter of stories that attempt to focus our minds and imaginations on the creativity of the many, the heroism of others and the sacrifices of others, very rarely do we examine the true magnitude and scope of the underground railroad and its historical accomplishments. Moreover, since slavery was such a lucrative money maker of an institution, a mountain of papers surrounded it. Many of those are still available for us to study.

It can confidently be said that by the beginning of the Civil War, there were more than one hundred thousand fugitive slaves in Canada, and thousands more in Mexico. Just about all of them having received some direct or indirect assistance from the U.G.R.R. Yet Mexico is usually not even mentioned as a destination on the U.G.R.R.-- but it was, and our already mentioned collective Seminoles played a key role that.

Think about it: “100,000 plus runaways,” while four million were still in bondage in the south. That roughly equals the proportion all of today’s Blacks in jail and prisons to the overall Black population of this country!

Canada became the main destination (other than the northern states) after the U.S. passed a “aggressive” Fugitive slave Law in 1850 since England (Canada’s ruler) had outlawed slavery, and would tolerate no violations of it’s territory by slave catchers.

Mexico, on the other hand, was open to those fleeing from Texas, but once there they would have to form “fighting alliances” with either our Seminoles or other Amerindian in order to protect their freedom from regular, aggressive slave catching expeditions from Texas, a replay of Seminoles days in Florida. Finally, an unknown number of runaways remained in the cities and towns, organized to defend themselves – not counting those Maroons still in the south’s swamps, backcountry, foothills and mountains.

Never before or since has this country had to cope with such a huge segment of it’s people offering such widespread, “militant” and economically damaging opposition to it’s authority and control.

Still, the popular conception is that the U.G.R.R. and it’s “Abolitionist” had a free ride, which included “overall” support outside of the south. Notwithstanding it’s breadth and depth, that is far from the reality! Admittedly, in certain places like Oberlin, Ohio and Boston, Massachusetts, abolition of slavery was supported by sizeable segments of the populace, but in most northern areas it

Historical overview

The following is a short outline of various workers struggles against early European imperialism, as practiced in Suriname, Jamaica, a number of southern areas of what is today the U.S., and finally Haiti. I’ll outline how workers who had been enslaved fought longer than Marx’s, “fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and peoples struggles...” in order to ultimately be able to exercise their own forms of self-determination and ‘political rule.’ And although all of them were as stratified as we are today, they were still able to democratically derive methods and policies that were collectively pursued by decentralized formations of their own making. And once winning their freedom from the various imperialist powers, unlike the later states ruled by Marxist vanguard formations, they never again relinquished their worker’s-based autonomy, until this day, with one exception (Haiti) which deserves special attention.

Afterwards, I hope that you do your own in depth research and study, because to most people the bulk of this history will be unfamiliar. Then you can decide whether such organizational forms and methods would be useful to us in our struggle to save ourselves and the planet.

Suriname

“We must slay the Hydra!” That was the Dutch imperialists’ main concern in Suriname from their earliest days there.

On the northern coast of South America, this tropical country borders Guyana and French Guyana and fronts the Caribbean Sea, with Brazil to its south. Geographically above one-third, again, as large as Cuba.

The first European interlopers to visit the area were the British, which were followed by the Dutch. Always it changed hands between them, but the Dutch were the main imperial power to occupy the country from the mid 1600s, up until the 1970s. All during that period, the overwhelming majority of the indigenous Amerindian populations were either suppressed, forced to flee to less hospitable areas, or exterminated.

The Dutch at that time were one of the world’s major imperial powers, vying alongside of the British, Spanish, Danish, Portuguese and the French for control of North and South America, the

of opposition the workers would face and the length of time it would take for them to overcome all of the obstacles in their path.

Marx, superb analyst that he was, due to the Eurocentric predilections that entrapped him, overlooked or dismissed important workers struggles that fell outside of Europe; or he at least failed to study them with the same intensity that he devoted to those European situations upon which he (primarily) based his otherwise well-based analysis. That set in motion other willful neglecting of formulating a proper evaluation of these ‘other’ struggles up until today even. A thorough study, evaluation, adaptation (wherever applicable) and understanding of some of these workers struggles will help us move forward in our struggle against imperialism. There, we’ll find proven, workable alternatives to the flawed democratic centralist forms of organizing: ones that mirror Stan Goff’s analysis of the strengths of the early Bolsheviks’ use of that form.

Back to the Future

First off, let me state that I’m not an anarchist. Yet, a lot of what you’ll read here is gonna look a whole lot like anarchism! To that I will only quote an unknown ancient, who after racking his brain to formulate answers to vexing problems, only later to discover that those who had come along before him had already expounded on what he thought were his intellectual inventions, is supposed to have blurted, “confound those ancients, they’ve stolen all of our best ideas.”

Therefore, to the anarchist reader, what follows cannot properly be termed anarchism, simply because the practitioners themselves never knew that word, nor were they in contact with people of that view, as anarchism is a European ideology and these parties – for the most part – were Africans and Amerindians with very limited input by a small number of outcast Europeans. Further, all of the struggles here written about had pretty much taken off and gained success prior to that concept’s spread – under its classical anarchist thinkers and practitioners.

Still, the affinity between anarchism and the following is not rejected; on the contrary, it’s welcomed as a sister set of ideas, beliefs and concepts – as long as the anarchists understand that they stand on equal footing, in a spirit of intercommunal self determination.

remained a “minorities” agenda. We know that because they could not get enough people behind them to stop the repressive arms of the state from interfering with their activities.

Furthermore, in a number of northern areas rich and powerful people and those in their employ relied on slavery to keep their livelihood and profits intact. Banking, manufacturing of farm instruments, chains, shackles, insurance and key political alliances all relied on the profits of slavery. No, the widespread and militant activities were carried on by the runaways themselves, and their U.G.R.R. supporters.

Consequently, Abolitionist in many places were periodically assaulted, jailed and killed. Moreover, their homes and families were burnt or attacked. They were arrested, imprisoned and generally never truly safe. Finally, the true Abolitionist was one who either directly or indirectly supported the U.G.R.R. and thus also had to be ready to defend runaways, associates and neighbors from armed and dangerous slave catchers and the authorities backing them – who, contrary to what’s usually highlighted – were more often than not their own neighbors, looking to gain a reward for identifying and kidnapping “runaways” and “free” Blacks alike.

Certainly, the so-called “Treason at Christiana” in 1851 is instructive as to the plight of both runaways and Abolitionist alike. Christiana, Lancaster County Pennsylvania is not far from Philadelphia – the main U.G.R.R. hub on the east coast... both on the “Mason Dixon Line,” the official divide between the northern and southern states and Pennsylvania and Maryland: free and slave states. Thus, a secondary but still much used U.G.R.R. escape route.

Enter William Parker and his wife, two Black runaways from Maryland who worked a small farm near Christiana for about ten years. Along with them lived the wife’s runaway mother, as well as their children. The farm itself was on lands leased to them by local White Abolitionist. In addition, there were other Black farmers nearby – both free and runaways. Even so, Parker and the others were not just farmers. In fact, they constituted a active, aggressive and very effective armed section of the U.G.R.R. As such, for years they had protected themselves, other runaways, free Blacks and the U.G.R.R. traffic from slave catching bounty hunters, which more often than not, were from neighboring communities. They had fought pitched gun battles with them, rode down and rescued kidnapped Blacks and tried to rescue others from the local jail.

With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, however, their situation was worsened. That act "commanded" all citizens – both north and south- to actively assist in the capture of fugitive slaves. All of the slavers and bounty hunters were greatly emboldened by it. So, the stage was set for the subsequent Christiana events.

As it were, a Maryland slaver received information that he could capture some of his runaway "property" in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Straightaway, he assembled his son, another relative and others and proceed to a Federal Courthouse in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he obtained an official warrant to capture his property. In addition, he was also appointed or hired a Federal Deputy and a city policeman to help in the undertaking.

Afterwards, this posse took a train out to Lancaster County; but unknown to them a U.G.R.R. "courier" was also on the train in their very coach- watching their every move. Low and behold, a Philadelphia U.G.R.R. spy had sent word to the local "Vigilance Committee" of what was learned about the warrant at the courthouse, prompting them to dispatch the courier to warn Parker and company. Thereafter, on the following day, the posse bribed someone to tell them that the two runaways they sought were hold up on Parkers farm. There, the Parkers and others waited whatever was to come.

As things turned out, the slavers boldly entered the ground floor of the Parkers home, while exhibiting the type of bluster one would expect, while the Parker's and other fugitives at first were on the second floor. Descending, Parker and some White Abolitionist tried to get the slavers to leave- to no avail. Thus, Parker's wife began to sound an alarm by using a window to send out blasts on a bugle. That caused a slaver to climb a tree and shoot into the window. Only causing her to duck down and continue to blow. In short order other Blacks began to show up– armed to their teeth.

Afterwards, things degenerated into a shooting, cutting and fighting melee. Before long all but one of the slavers were either wounded or being chased through the countryside by the Blacks. The ringleader, moreover, after being wounded was "finished off by the women." No Blacks were seriously hurt. In the aftermath, of course, the government leveled a lot of repression on the re-maining Blacks and the White Abolitionist, going as far as to jail and try both groups. They all, however, were exonerated, and all of the runaways and their children escaped through the U.G.R.R. – except

Disorder (2004, Softskull Press), believes that DC as practiced by Lenin and his Bolsheviks did have a democratic basis, whereby an open and intense democratic struggle was carried out in order to arrive at positions and policies. Then all the party workers would move in a decentralized, free wheeling manner to make possible the implementation of those decisions (in the teeth of czarist repression), which ultimately had the effect of centralizing their combined efforts, only later to change their methods. This led to a more all around centralization and very little democracy, if any. Without a doubt, any number of other Marxist/Leninist/Maoist (style) groups have had similar experiences.

Yet, if the clear historical tendency is to always gravitate towards less democratic and more oppressive forms of control, then quite frankly for one to say their use of historical materialism is leading them to formulate correct liberation ideas, theories and plans by using democratic centralism is ludicrous!

The Contemporary Situation

Here we are at the beginning of the 21st century, facing a global crisis unknown heretofore in the entire history of humankind. The threats to our collective existence are so multidimensional, it would take many other works to detail them all. Consequently, I'll limit myself to those that I believe are paramount to helping us break out of self-imposed mental roadblocks that hinder our efforts to move forward.

The main threat to humankind, the flora and fauna and our entire biosphere, is capitalist imperialism: a totally out of control, predatory, global system of accumulation and oppression that's on a collision course with the limitations of our planet: daily devouring children, women, people of color, the poor, workers of all stripes, wildlife and the environment in pursuit of profits.

All of our problems primarily rest on the artificial divisions that have been engendered between the oppressed for hundreds of years: divisions based on gender, race, ethnicity, culture, geography, sexual preferences, age and otherwise. These divisions have been fostered, historically, by those who have sought to use them in their pursuit of power and material gain.

Under imperialism, the overwhelming majority of our planet's humans are, ultimately, workers. Thus, Marx's address to the IWMA still holds true today. Albeit, he underestimated the degree

domination – as opposed to trying to make a “concrete analysis of concrete conditions,” as V.I. Lenin instructed.

I had reached these conclusions on my own. But later I was astounded to learn that the Marxist giant C.L.R. James (the author of the theory that explains state capitalism, and the mentor of the African revolutionaries Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah—who brought both Kenya and Ghana out of colonialism) as early as 1963 had said,

We have repudiated the conception of the vanguard party. That conception ruined the socialist movement, and the movement of the proletariat, for a generation...The vanguard party conception ruined all attempts to form a Marxist party in the US and contributed substantially to the catastrophes which have befallen it...What has happened is that their whole outlook and mentality have been dominated by the concept of a vanguard party which had to teach the people about Marxism, and other such matter which would make the people understand that they, the preachers, were the ones who should be followed as they were the leaders of the socialist revolution...The whole Stalinist experiment, the whole Nazi regime, are not the result of evil men. They are the result of the drive towards the unification of the executive and political organization of all aspects of the State [Democratic Centralism's historical modus operandi, which is supervised and enforced by the vanguard party].

At the same time, history has shown that such ruthless methods are effective: if the objectives of those who used the democratic centralist methods were simply to seize power, then their record during the 20th century was impressive. It has proved itself as brutally efficient and capable of outdoing anything the bourgeois forces are capable of.

Nevertheless, in the end those who gained power using democratic centralist method have always ended up using it to defeat the aspirations of the workers and oppressed, and subsequently install the users of it as a new oppressive ruling class.

How could it be expected to produce any other outcome? Democratic centralism concentrates more power in the hands of a relative few than any mechanisms the masses the former purport to be serving can muster: a recipe that's bound to conflict with the vagaries of flawed humans. Stan Goff, in his masterful *Full Spectrum*

the elderly mother.

In Oberlin and other northern areas similar “militant” actions were taken: invading courtrooms and jails to forcibly rescue and spirit away fugitives, overpowering any guards or like minded individuals, usually resulting in some Abolitionist being arrested and tried.

Then, there were the “Vigilance Committees,” U.G.R.R. “Conductors” and “Stockholders”. Those brave and committed individuals, along with their public agitators, newspapers, and a handful of elected officials were the “technicians” of the movement, while it's “heart and soul” was always the runaways themselves. The latter, as is well documented, used all manner of creativity, ruses and violence, to escape on foot, by carriage, horseback, boat, box (Henry “Box” Brown was only one of a number of men and women known to have shipped themselves – as freight – to freedom); and on most of these flights, some U.G.R.R. were involved... north, south, east, and west.

Make no mistake about it, the U.G.R.R. was anchored by a cadre of truly “selfless” people addressing each other with respect, warmth and commitment: “Dear Friend William Still,” (Philadelphia's brave, intelligent and masterful Vigilance Committee head). “Dear Friend.” “Esteemed Friend,” “Dear Friend and Brother,” “ Truly thy Friend,” “ Thine for the poor Slave” and on and on... Whether motivated by religious convictions or otherwise, the dispassionate student cannot help but reach that conclusion. Indeed, a study of the huge amount of extant U.G.R.R. correspondence, coupled with what's known of their risks and sacrifices, makes any detractors seem foolish or narrow minded ideologues whom you can be assured cannot themselves produce similar bona fides.

And remember, this ain't no chess or debating club we're talking about! Harriet Tubman always went armed and vowed never to be taken alive. Levi Coffin had armed relatives to protect his person and home. John Brown helped Blacks in the north set up a armed section of the U.G.R.R., like the Parkers in Lancaster County. And, for two decades after leaving Florida, the Seminoles in Mexico fought off any number of large and small parties of slave catchers.

Add to that, this wonderful correspondence could just as easily land the “Friends” and U.G.R.R. writers in jail-or worse! if it were to fall in the wrong hands. Even more astonishing, they were not being paid to take these risks, they were not “drafted” by any government and only a few were professional politicians. Thus, the

author having himself spent decades as part of a similar 1960's generated "Movement", can readily recognize the same type of altruism that he's been fortunate enough to witness amongst his own comrades (latter day "Friends").

Clearly then, this moral and humane endeavor played a major role in "forcing" the entire country to ultimately involve itself in a bloody clash to resolve the slavery issue. Yes, the emerging industrial system in the north, depending as it did on "wage slavery" was on a collision course with the south's system of "unpaid labor". Never the less, on the eve of the Civil War, there were more "millionaire" (slavers) in the Mississippi Delta then could be found in all areas outside of it-- a Southern Aristocracy that had absolutely no intention or incentive to abolish slavery. If anything, they were busy trying to spread it to the lands from which the Amerindians were being pushed off. Consequently, if the "U.G.R.R. and the abolitionist had not forced them to "panic" and secede from the Union"- provoking the Civil War- there's no telling how many more decades their system could have survived!

Thus, the U.G.R.R. stands as the most "Militant Egalitarian Movement" this country has ever seen. Others have come close; Women's Suffrage Movement, Labor Movement, Civil Rights Movement and the Anti Vietnam War Movement. But it's beyond argument to suggest that any of those movements had to tackle and defeat the most heinous form of oppression known: chattel slavery!

In a separate category, however, must be placed the Black, Native American, Puerto Rican and Chicano/Mexicano "Liberation Movements". Militant is not a word that fits these struggles' needs. They need "Revolutionary" changes, something never sought by the U.G.R.R. or most Abolitionists.

Finally, from my studies, it seems as though history is reluctant to bring forth the type of mass selflessness displayed by the participants in the U.G.R.R. – except once every few generations. Maybe the following generation(s) just feel as though they should rest and collect and enjoy the fruits of their forerunners sacrifices. That said, the author challenges readers to more closely study the resistance to slavery in North America, and then look in the mirror and ask yourself just where you fit in the historical drama? How do you measure up to the generations outlined here, that had so much effect on events until today's oppressors try very hard to keep their "Real" accomplishments hidden?

The Dragon and the Hydra: A Historical Study of Organizational Methods

"You have fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and people's struggles to go through, not only to change the conditions but in order to change yourselves and make yourselves fit for political rule."

– Karl Marx addressing the IWMA, the body that would later become the First International

Marx's words hit close to home. I've been involved in such movements for forty years, a product – originally – of the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960s, and subsequently being held as a political prisoner in the U.S. since 1972. Over that period, I've participated in a number of mass and party formations. It never fails to amaze me how much energy and time is dedicated towards establishing various groups' claims to being the so-called vanguard of some struggle for justice, when in the end most of these exercises turn out to be sterile, when they don't degenerate into fratricidal conflicts.

Furthermore, I'd hazard it to say, that the entire history of Marxist Leninist social change has known few other methods, leading me to further say that a sober analysis of that history points to a struggle for supremacy – not only over the bourgeois ruling class, but also against the working class and all other oppressed people; against any and all formations either of the latter pull together that escape their control. Thus, their mantra of doing everything to seize power for the working class and oppressed is a farce.

If there has ever been a Marxist Leninist vanguard party who has found itself in power and did not subsequently follow that script, I'm not aware of it. While arguments can always be found to rationalize why it was/is necessary to resort to such measures, and many such arguments do make sense – initially – a closer look always seems to force adherents to fall back on the mantra of the flawed individual(s) who did not hold true to democratic centralism's principles, which are themselves wide open to interpretation and manipulation, in order to seize the initiative in a struggle for